NOTES ON BIRDS OF THE GOMEZ FARIAS REGION OF TAMAULIPAS [1]

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ON June 20 and 21, and again from August 4 to 7 in 1946, we collected and made observations on birds in the Gomez Farias region of southwestern Tamaulipas, Mexico. The information in the following paper is presented as a supplement to the thorough report by George Miksch Sutton and Olin Sewall Pettingill, Jr. (1942),[2] which was based largely on the work in this area of the Cornell University-Carleton College Expedition from March 12 to May 4, 1941.

We recorded four species not listed in that report, *Columbigallina talpacoti, Sittasomus griseicapillus, Habia* sp. and *Basileuterus rufifrons*. In addition, we obtained further data on the extent of the breeding season and noted the presence of several migrants from the north (in the first week of August).

The State of Tamaulipas, bounded on the east by the Gulf of Mexico and on the north by Texas, includes part of the great mountain range known as the Sierra Madre Oriental, which runs through the southern and central portions of the State near the western border. Streams draining the eastern slopes of this mountain range in the vicinity of Gomez Farias join to form the Rio Guayalejo, which flows generally southward to the Rio Tamesi. Near the coast, the Tamesi forms part of the Tamaulipas-Veracruz border, emptying into the Gulf of Mexico at Tampico. It was close to the easternmost ridges of the Sierra Madre, along one of the tributaries of the Rio Guayalejo, that we camped in 1946. (See Map 1.)

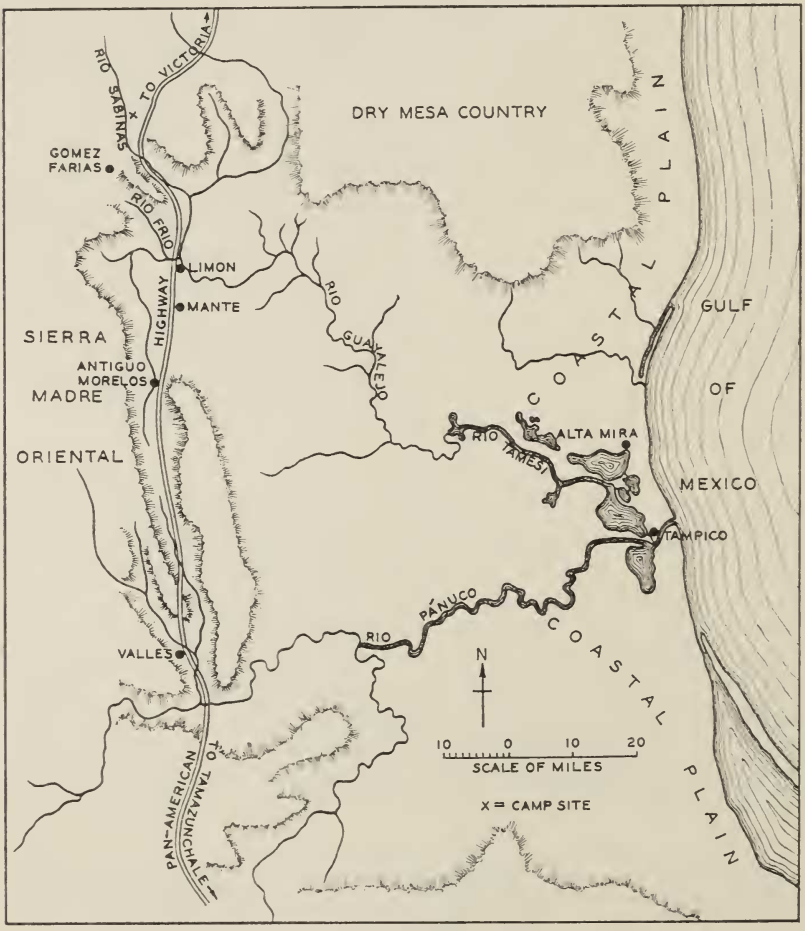
Our camp site, about 30 feet above the water on the east bank of the Rio Sabinas, was on the E. W. Storms ranch, called "Pano Ayuctle," the Aztec name for "pumpkin ford." Pano Ayuctle is about 88 kilometers south of Victoria, Tamaulipas, and three kilometers west of the Pan-American Highway opposite kilometer-mark 618 (north from Mexico, D.F.). Mesquite and wild pineapple thickets border much of the branch road to Pano Ayuctle. In the numerous small clearings near the river, corn and sugar cane are the principal crops. We frequently encountered plantings of mangoes and citrus trees, chiefly lime, lemon, and orange, in the vicinity of the dwellings, and at Pano Ayuctle these were supplemented by a few coffee trees and ornamentals, such as the royal palms lining the entrance road, flamboyants (*Delonix*), and

[1] To Dr. George M. Sutton, of the University of Michigan, we are grateful for numerous suggestions helpful in the preparation of this report. The specimens mentioned are now in his collection. Dr. Robert T. Clausen, of Cornell University, kindly helped with the identification of some of the plants. The U.S. National Museum and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service generously allowed access to their bird collections.

[2] "Birds of the Gomez Farias Region, Southwestern Tamaulipas," *Auk*, 59:1–34.

Spanish cedars (probably *Cedrela mexicana*). Along the river are many cypress trees, frequently with the epiphytic strangling fig wound about their trunks. Under these trees are thickets of dense tropical vegetation covering the few feet between the river and the edge of the cultivated area. At our camp site, the river was about 50 feet wide, and 8 feet deep at the deepest point, while upstream and downstream it was constricted and shallowed into riffles at frequent intervals.

On four occasions, one of us made a trip to the small range of hills west of the Rio Sabinas; this area will be referred to as "the mountain." To reach the mountain it was necessary to ford the river and walk west along trails which traversed the valley floor. Along these trails



Map 1.

were thick second growth tangles with, here and there, a few clearings planted in corn. Unbroken forests of tall trees covered the mountain, and beneath the trees were small patches of wild pineapple and bamboo. Large rocks littered the ground and often formed crevices which extended 20 or more feet straight down from ground level. It was in this mountain forest that many species of birds concentrated in flocks early in August to feed on the ripening fruits of the trees. Intensive field work along the eastern slopes of this range in August and September should yield important data on bird distribution.

A striking feature of the upper Rio Sabinas is a huge circular spring called in Spanish the *nacimiento*—literally, *birth* [of the river]. This spring is approximately 75 feet in diameter and furnishes most of the water for the river—at least to the Pan-American Highway crossing, approximately 25 kilometers downstream. The spring is bordered on the west by ledges of stratified rock, while on the northeast side a small drainage stream from the valley above empties into it. Seepage water trickles down over the rock ledges but adds no appreciable amount to the great flow of water rising from the depths of the pool. The stream flowing into the *nacimiento* contributes probably no more than a twentieth of the volume of the river except during the rainy season.

The reason for the occurrence of many peculiarly neotropical birds along the Rio Sabinas and adjacent foothills of the Sierra Madre Oriental (Gomez Farias region) is evident upon examination of the physiography of the region. (See Map 1.) The three factors which we think have a direct effect in making this region the northern limit of distribution for certain birds are:

a. The humid forest which is more or less continuous along the eastern slopes of the foothills of the Sierra Madre Oriental from Veracruz northward to a point approximately 50 miles south of Victoria, Tamaulipas. The humidity of this strip is maintained by the easterly winds coming off the Gulf of Mexico, rising on reaching the mountains, and precipitating rain along the eastern slopes. The cloud-banner mentioned by Sutton and Pettingill (1942) [2] is probably the result of these climatic conditions.

b. Large rivers, such as the Tamesi and Guayalejo, up which birds make their way from the coast.

c. The dry mesa country north and east of the Rio Sabinas, which extends from the Sierra Madre Oriental nearly to the Gulf of Mexico and acts as a barrier to further northward extension of such humid-forest birds as *Sittasomus griseicapillus* and *Cyclarhis gujanensis*.

It is interesting that in early August, while some northern migrants were already moving southward through the Gomez Farias region along the Sierra Madre Oriental, several of the local species of birds were still nesting or feeding young-on-the-wing.

Species not Previously Recorded from the Region

Columbigallina talpacoti. Ruddy Ground Dove. On August 7 Eaton saw four of these birds on the mountain at about 1,000 feet elevation. They were flushed from the forest floor, where they had apparently been feeding on fruits which had ripened and dropped to the ground.

Sittasomus griseicapillus sylvioides. Mexican Sittasomus. On August 6, on the mountain at about 800 feet elevation, Eaton collected a male specimen with small testes. Two Canyon Wrens (*Catherpes mexicanus*) were moving about and singing when the little Sittasomus flew to a nearby tree. It acted much like a Brown Creeper (*Certhia familiaris*), creeping up one tree and then flying to the bottom of another and starting up again. It made no sound of any sort. On collecting it, we noted that the iris was dark brown and the tarsi gray. The molt was apparently complete except that the three outermost primaries were still more or less sheathed at the base. The outermost primary of the right wing was missing. That of the left wing measured 20 mm.; the next, about 37 mm.; the third (from the outside), 61 mm. In a comparable non-molting specimen the same feathers measure, respectively, 46, 60, and 66 mm.

On August 7, Eaton saw another Sittasomus farther up the mountain—at about 1,000 feet.

Our Gomez Farias specimen is larger (wing 83, tail 83 mm.) than the specimens of *sylvioides* from Veracruz in the United States National Museum and is slightly duller on the rump and upper tail coverts. However, considering the extreme freshness of the plumage (which affords maximum wing and tail measurements), we place the bird with this race for the present. So far as we have been able to ascertain, the species has never before been recorded from Tamaulipas.

Basileuterus rufifrons. Rufous-capped Warbler. Eaton saw one of this species August 6 at the foot of the mountain at the edge of a clearing.

Habia sp. Ant tanager. Eaton saw four or five ant tanagers on the mountain in dense bamboo thickets under tall forest trees on August 7. The birds were travelling in a noisy little group and were quite difficult to approach.

Notes on Nidification

Columba flavirostris. Red-billed Pigeon. On March 18, 1941, Lea (Sutton and Pettingill, 1942) [2] noted a Red-billed Pigeon with a twig in its bill. On June 20, we saw one carrying nesting material into a monkey's-ear tree (*Pithecolobium*).

Scardafella inca. Inca Dove. Pettingill (Sutton and Pettingill, 1942) [2] found a nest of this species with two heavily incubated eggs on March 30, 1941. In 1946, we learned from a local ranch owner that a pair of Inca Doves had just successfully raised young in a tree in his yard during the latter half of June. On August 5, Eaton flushed an Inca Dove that was incubating two eggs. These facts indicate that the species nests through at least six months of the year in this region.

Crotophaga sulcirostris. Groove-billed Ani. On June 20, Edwards saw an adult make several trips with food to a small tree near our camp and presumed it was feeding young. On August 7 we noticed almost full-grown young Anis moving about in little groups.

Tyrannus melancholicus. Olive-backed Kingbird. Edwards saw this species feeding nearly full-grown young on August 6 near the foot of the mountain.

Myiozetetes similis. Social Flycatcher. On June 20 Edwards discovered a nest in a small clump of Spanish moss (*Tillandsia* sp.) which hung from a vine attached to a tree branch high above the river. Its owner was apparently feeding young.

Parula pitiayumi. Pitiayumi Warbler. On August 5, Edwards saw an adult feeding a young bird just out of the nest.

Tanagra lauta. Bonaparte's Euphonia. In the afternoon of June 20, Eaton saw a young bird hunting food near an adult female. When the adult caught an insect, the young stopped its ineffectual bug hunt and begged—chipping, and vibrating its wings. The young was like the female but with lighter yellow on the breast and lighter olive on the back. On August 7, Edwards saw a male and female building a nest near the river in a small mass of Spanish moss at the end of a pendant branch. They made several trips to the nest carrying small pieces of what appeared to be thin bark, entering the clump of moss through a poorly defined opening in the side.

Fall Migrants

Actitis macularia. Spotted Sandpiper. On August 5, Edwards saw this species at the *nacimiento.* Later in the day, at two points along the river between the *nacimiento* and Pano Ayuctle, we saw the species again (single individuals).

Mniotilta varia. Black and White Warbler. On August 7, Eaton saw one of these warblers in the forest on the mountain, at about 900 feet elevation.

Seiurus motacilla. Louisiana Water-Thrush. On August 5, we saw single birds at three localities along the Rio Sabinas between the *nacimiento* and Pano Ayuctle. We heard one give a whisper-like song.

Icterus spurius. Orchard Oriole. On August 6, Edwards saw an adult male, which we presume was a migrant, in a large tree near the edge of a cornfield west of the Rio Sabinas near Pano Ayuctle.

Miscellaneous Notes

Ictinia plumbea. Plumbeous Kite. We saw single Kites on June 20 and 21, and on August 5 saw two perched in the top of a large cypress tree two miles upstream from Pano Ayuctle. One of these was immature with a streaked breast and short tail; the other was adult.

Claravis pretiosa. Blue Ground Dove. We saw this dove for the first time on August 5 about a mile from Pano Ayuctle. August 6 and 7, Eaton saw three on the flat land near the base of the mountain. Sutton and Pettingill (1942) [2] included the species in their list on the basis of one sight record.

Cyclarhis gujanensis flaviventris. Mexican Pepper Shrike. On August 7, Eaton shot a molting female on the mountain at about 800 feet elevation. When first seen, it was hanging almost upside down on a swaying branch. Its actions reminded Eaton of the behavior of a parrot. Pettingill (Sutton and Pettingill, 1942) [2] took the only specimen heretofore recorded in Tamaulipas.

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